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SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W, AF/C, INR/AA
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/06/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV PBTS PHSA ASEC CM NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN MFA SAYS BAKASSI HANDOVER PROCEEDING AS
SCHEDEDULED

REF: A. ABUJA 1543 AND PREVIOUS
1B. YAOUNDE 762 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Acting DCM Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) On August 6, A/DCM spoke with Amb. Chike Anigbo, MFA African Affairs Department Director (A/S equivalent) to discuss whether the handover of the Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon might be delayed by the court case against the handover recently filed by Bakassi residents (see ref A). Anigbo insisted that, in the MFA's view, the ICJ ruling trumps any ruling coming out of the Nigerian Federal High Court, and expressed confidence that the Justice Ministry would be able to act to counter the High Court ruling in time for the handover of Bakassi to proceed as planned on August 114. He said the Yar'Adua government considered itself committed to the UNSC to carry out the ICJ ruling and the Greentree Agreement, a position which had already been conveyed to the GRC.

12. (C) In a later conversation, A/DCM asked Tony Eze, MFA East and Central Africa Division Director (Office Director equivalent), about preparations for the handover, and about any formal ceremony being planned. Eze said the GON was planning a ceremony for August 14, but had not yet agreed with the government of Cross River State on the location. He did not expect these discussions to be completed until meetings scheduled to take place in Calabar this coming weekend. While appropriate representatives from the GON and GRC had been invited to attend the ceremony, he did not know if the witnesses to Greentree (the U.S., UK and France) would be asked to do so. He did expect a UN representative as well as Prince Bola Ajibola, Chairman of the Nigeria-Cameroon Mixed Commission. (Note: Ajibola, a former Nigerian Justice Minister, told journalists August 5 that "Nigeria has never owned Bakassi, ... though we must admit that our people took possession of its western strip." He added that Nigerian honoring the ICJ ruling was "a matter of international law." End note.)

13. (C) According to our British colleagues here, the FCO in London was contacted by the UN and told that a handover ceremony would take place in Abana, on the Bakassi peninsula. (FYI: according to our largest maps, Abana is located about 30km south of Calabar on the southwest side of the peninsula and about 10km inside what all will now recognize to be Cameroonian territory. It is only reachable by boat. End

FYI.) The British High Commission is recommending to London that HMG send no representative, given the security situation in the vicinity of Bakassi.

¶4. (C) Comment: While we remain hopeful the handover will proceed as scheduled, we certainly cannot exclude the possibility that the court case could delay it. We have an August 7 meeting scheduled with the Special Assistant to the Attorney General, and will attempt to learn more about the GON's legal strategy then. End comment.

PIASCIK